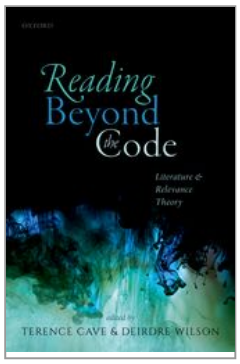

Reading Beyond the Code: Literature and Relevance Theory
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Print publication date: 2018
Print ISBN-13: 9780198794776
Published to Oxford Scholarship Online: June 2018
DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198794776.001.0001

‘Look Again’, ‘Listen, Listen’, ‘Keep Looking’

Emergent Properties and Sensorimotor Imagining in Mary Oliver’s Poetry

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DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198794776.003.0008

Abstract and Keywords

This chapter offers a way of understanding the effects of poetic images (metaphorical or literal). It employs and extends the notion of ‘emergent properties’, as well as relevance theory’s account of how communicative acts can ‘show’ as much as they mean. The images examined are from poems by Mary Oliver (‘Wings’, ‘Wild Geese’, and ‘Mindful’). The chapter suggests that such poetry is particularly in need of a new theoretical approach capable of engaging with its focus on embodied experience and ‘merging’ with nature. It shows how ‘emergent properties’—for example, a complex sense of what continuity with nature might feel like—can result from engaging in a range of imaginary sensorimotor experiences. The final section of the chapter turns to an abstract painting by Natalia Wróbel which dialogues with Oliver’s poetry, and fleshes out the relevance theory account of communicative showing to articulate differences between artistic genres and media.

Keywords: emergent properties, images, sensorimotor experience, Mary Oliver, nature poetry, merging, showing, metaphor, abstract painting, Natalia Wróbel

Figurative utterances raise an abiding question not only for literary study, but also for philosophy and linguistics. This chapter and the following one open a pathway into that question offered by the notion of a ‘cognitive criticism’ for which relevance theory provides a valuable frame of reference. Once again, what makes the difference above all is the insistence on a broadly inferential model rather than a code model of communication. Literary analysis needs to

attend to stylistic and poetic effects that are often tenuous, nuances that may seem virtually intangible, reverberations that shift with the act of reading and re-reading. Relevance theorists approach such effects in terms of a notion of ‘weak implicature’, and often characterize the type of communication involved as ‘vague’. Literary specialists are liable to see these as pejorative terms, but for relevance theorists they carry no such connotation. They belong to the spectrum of implicatures which, at one extreme, take the form of propositions that the communicator unarguably intended to convey, and at the other involve no more than hints or pointers, for which the evidence that they were intended by the communicator is typically less than conclusive. The spectrum itself, including the ‘wide array of weak implicatures’ generated by some very common kinds of utterance, is straightforwardly analysable within a relevance theory perspective, but presents a challenge to purely formal or code-based accounts of communication.

It is time, perhaps, for literary study to become attentive once more to these effects, which demonstrate what language is capable of where communication is tested to its uttermost. Programmatic or ideological modes of reading are liable to set them aside as non-essential, or purely ‘aesthetic’, but this book takes the opposite view. We (the contributors to this volume) share the belief that the massively rich implicatures characteristic of literary language have an ecological wildness that can only be tamed at a heavy cost: they bespeak human capacities which, in an increasingly instrumentalized world, risk being marginalized, and potentially even stunted or etiolated.

Kathryn Banks focuses primarily on the so-called ‘emergent properties’ that arise from the convergence or superimposition of figurative and sensorimotor elements in the poetry of Mary Oliver. As Banks explains, what is meant by ‘emergent’ here is that such properties take shape as the poetic utterance develops without being reducible to the sum of its parts. This way of thinking about processes has been deployed across the disciplinary spectrum, for example to characterize the way in which biological ‘life’ might emerge (or might have emerged) from a series of chemical reactions. It imposes an essentially dynamic conception of cognitive process, and thus lends itself well to the analysis of how utterances unfold themselves progressively along a temporal axis: in this respect, it is not ***(p.128)*** *unlike the ‘array of implicatures’ or the ‘spreading activation patterns’ that characterize the cognitive afterlife of a given utterance.*

Banks uses the poetry of Mary Oliver to show how poetic uses of language can invite the reader to participate in an experience which may well be sensory, or sensorimotor, and which cannot be fully captured in terms of a finite propositional description. Her discussion thus touches on the somewhat controversial notion of ‘qualia’, the distinctive feelings that are familiar in life yet are hard to communicate in language: what it ‘feels like’ to drink a glass of

cold water when you’re thirsty, or catch the scent of new-mown grass, or realize that you’ve lost your wallet.[1] *Seen in terms of relevance theory, such effects are a special case of a generalization which holds for all communicative acts: utterances are offered as evidence of what the speaker feels or thinks.*

Introduction

Relevance theory articulates what happens when we communicate not only meanings but also ‘vague’ impressions and emotions.[1] Therefore it offers literary studies a framework for analysing the imprecise and the elusive; and it challenges us to reflect more on what is at stake if we say a literary text or author ‘means’ something, and on how else we might talk about what texts and authors and readers do. Furthermore, because relevance theory scrutinizes acts of communication which ‘show’ as much as they mean, it allows for a consideration of how texts engage our bodies, and for a dialogue with approaches to literature grounded in kinesic analysis or embodied cognition. However, as a number of contributions to this volume make clear, there is more thinking to do in relevance theory about the role played by the sensorimotor imagination, and investigating literature might offer distinctive insights. In this chapter, I examine how sensorimotor responses to poetic images can make something emerge which goes beyond what a code model of communication would predict that the words on the page might produce. I will work with the notion linguists have termed ‘emergent properties’, but extend it to engage with the multiple sensorimotor responses that poetic images can invite.

The images are taken from the work of Mary Oliver (b. 1935), a US ‘latter-day Romantic’ and ‘ecopoet’ who foregrounds embodied experience of the natural world.[2] **(p.130)** Oliver’s poetry arguably communicates impressions as much as meanings; it shows as much as it means. Therefore relevance theory might enable us to articulate better how her poetry works. A new theoretical approach seems particularly desirable for poets like Oliver, at least if we want to take seriously poets’ and readers’ claims to experience and emotion. Although Oliver is a prolific and popular prizewinning poet, her work has received little critical attention, and this has been plausibly attributed to contemporary critical models ill-suited to considering what is arguably the crux of her poetry, namely her profound interest in ‘merging’ with the world, or in a concomitant merging and individuation.[3] Furthermore, where postmodern literary theory has been marshalled to tackle her poetry, this has not, in my view, done much to account for likely experiences of reading it. In this chapter, in addition to advancing the relevance theory account of how emergent properties can stem from sensorimotor responses to images, I aim to use this enhanced account to explain how Oliver’s readers might get a sense of her concomitant merging and individuation. Then, towards the end of the essay, I turn to a painting which dialogues with Oliver’s poetry. This enables me to explore how we might flesh out the relevance theory account of communicative showing, and articulate

differences between artistic genres and media within the model of human communication and cognition which it provides.

Showing, Vagueness, and Sensorimotor Responses

Relevance theory draws attention to effects of human communication which are ‘vague’. While vague communication includes what is conveyed by use of verbal forms, Sperber and Wilson focus at the outset on the example of Mary who—on a visit to the seaside with Peter—looks out of the window and sniffs ostensively and appreciatively.[4] What Mary does is to show something to Peter; that is, invite him to engage his senses, to look and sniff as she does. For relevance theory, such showing is on a continuum with meaning: its account of communication is intended to work across the full range of human communicative acts, which to varying degrees show and/or mean.

Mary Oliver also does a great deal of showing. While her poems include reflective or abstract statements and questions, they frequently offer concrete and detailed observations of individual aspects of nature, such as an animal or bird or flower or weather phenomenon or part of a landscape. Oliver evokes her own looking, listening, **(p.131)** touching, smelling, and tasting, as well as her walks through nature. She invites her readers both to look at nature literally (Oliver has commented that readers unfamiliar with nature cannot really ‘feel’ nature poems[5]) and also to engage with the images of nature which she paints for them. This invitation takes the form of both explicit instruction (imperatives like the examples in my chapter title appear frequently) and also various more indirect means, such as offering concrete descriptions or metaphorical images, questioning whether her addressees have observed a particular natural phenomenon or commenting on the likelihood that they have done so, emphasizing the importance of sensory perception, and using the present tense and deictics to encourage readers to engage with what her poetry depicts. So, like the Mary of relevance theory fame, albeit verbally, Mary Oliver ‘shows’ her addressees what she sees and invites them to ‘look’ in turn.

So, what happens in showing or, more generally, in ‘vague’ communication? Sperber and Wilson note that while Mary can expect to steer Peter’s thoughts in a certain direction, she cannot have precise expectations about the exact conclusions he will draw. Or, in the vocabulary of relevance theory, any communicator has in mind a representation of the *array* of assumptions which she intends to make manifest (perceptible or inferable) or more manifest, but not necessarily of *each* assumption in the array, and, in the vaguest forms of communication, she represents none of them individually. The communication of an impression is described as producing a noticeable change in one’s cognitive environment; that is, relatively small alterations in the manifestness of many assumptions. Peter might notice that the air smells fresh, that it reminds him of their previous holidays, that he can smell seaweed, and so on; he is reasonably safe in assuming that Mary must have intended him to notice at least some of

these things. However, she may not have intended to draw his attention to any one of them in particular. So, in vague communication, at least part of the communicator’s intention can be fulfilled in several roughly similar but not identical ways, with roughly similar import, and the addressee takes a greater responsibility for the resulting interpretation than in cases where the speaker makes a small number of assumptions strongly manifest.[6]

As Raphael Lyne suggests in Chapter 2 of this volume, this analysis of vague communication allows us to articulate a middle ground situated between, on the one hand, judging that ‘anything read into the poem is fair enough’ and, on the other hand, understanding authorial intention narrowly as the communication of a specific determinate meaning. If we read in accordance with what relevance theory calls a communicator’s ‘informative intention’, then our readings can (and do and should) radically exceed what is encoded, yet at the same time they are constrained by our human cognitive predisposition to consider intentions and agency, and by the shared understanding of communication which results from that predisposition.[7] Where authors offer ‘vaguely’ communicated impressions, readers (like Peter at the **(p.132)** seaside) take a large degree of responsibility in constructing their interpretations, so that the responsibility is shared (to different degrees) between author and reader. In other words, there is an array of possible readings which an author could, in theory, recognize as fulfilling her intention, without her having intended them in the sense of having represented them to herself in the forms in which readers might verbalize them. While this might seem unsurprising, I think it does invite us to reflect on how we articulate what authors and texts and readers do, and on when and whether we can talk about ‘competing’ interpretations or ‘the meaning’ of a text. In Oliver’s poetry, sometimes particular thoughts are communicated quite explicitly, but often what she shows us, as the case of Mary and Peter might suggest, invites a wide array of possible responses. The images I analyse might be read differently —and there exists neither critical consensus concerning their interpretation nor much evidence of how Oliver’s many readers respond to them[8]—but my readings are intended to be situated in the ‘middle ground’ of responding to authorial intention conceived broadly and following the relevance theory model of informative intention.

Oliver’s mode of ‘showing’ of course differs from that of relevance theory’s Mary not only because it is expressed in language but also insofar as it promises different kinds of insights and thus invites a different intensity of ‘looking’. It is a central claim of relevance theory that the effort devoted to processing a communicative act is in proportion to the cognitive benefits we expect to accrue from doing so.[9] For Peter at the seaside, the fact that he can satisfy Mary’s intention in various ways means that he does not need to invest much time weighing up the different possibilities. By contrast, Oliver is writing poetry, which, in her words, is ‘sacred’,[10] and, in those of Cave and Wilson in the Introduction to this volume, ‘is an ostensive act which raises expectations of

relevance’. Cave and Wilson observe that the distinctiveness of many literary texts (and religious ones) as communicative acts might be captured in terms of an overt linguistic or logical difficulty which rewards interpretive effort and invites sustained processing. Oliver’s poems are not usually difficult in this obvious sense. Instead, sustained ‘processing’ is provoked by repeated suggestions that close and slow attention—which Oliver models for readers—might offer some **(p.133)** special experience of the world, so that, as Oliver has put it, by reading nature poems we ‘begin or deepen our own journey into the leaves and the sky’.[11]

But how can reading poetry make this happen? A postmodern approach, grounded in the code model of linguistic communication, seems to come up short in answering this question. Laird Christensen argues that ‘only a poor caricature of the experience can be rendered in the clumsy building blocks of language’, which ‘necessarily diminishes presences’, but that Oliver’s repeated leaps from concrete observations to metaphysical speculations alert the reader to moments of presence experienced by the poet in the gaps between the two.[12] While Oliver’s shifts between observations and speculations are undoubtedly crucial, this analysis does not tell us anything about the role of the observations themselves—of the sensory imagining in which they invite the reader to engage—except to suggest, implausibly to my mind, that they have little effect. By contrast, approaching the reader’s experience using relevance theory allows us to consider how authors and readers do something with language, so that authors might make readers feel something—not, to be sure, as literary theories have demonstrated in various ways, a reproduction of the author’s own experience, but nonetheless something which bears some similarity to it, and which can be communicated and felt rather than only borne witness to in the ‘gaps’ of language. Relevance theory offers a way of going beyond the postmodernist observation that words do not in themselves achieve as much as we might think, and of getting at what Christensen calls ‘the constellation of emotions and implications that accrue to those words and flicker through the spaces between them’ (p. 139). More specifically, I will argue in this chapter that employing and expanding the notion of ‘emergent properties’ within a relevance theory framework can enable us to grasp how sensorimotor imagining makes something ‘emerge’ for Oliver’s readers.

Emergent Properties and Poetic Images

Emergent properties, or features, most often stem from metaphors. In that case, they are properties which are attributed to the metaphor topic but are not stored as part of our representation of the metaphor vehicle. For example, the expression ‘my surgeon is a butcher’ is used to communicate that the surgeon is incompetent and does not care for his patients, although incompetence and lack of caring are not properties associated with butchers. Emergent properties have also been found in the comprehension of intuitively literal language; for example, experiments indicate that, in understanding ‘Oxford graduate factory

worker’ or ‘rugby player who knits’, people typically produce properties such as ‘failure’ and ‘confused’ respectively, which are not usually associated with any of the terms in the compound.[13] **(p.134)** The term ‘emergent properties’ is not specific to relevance theory, and linguists of different persuasions (for example, conceptual metaphor theorists) have sought to explain the existence of this phenomenon; however, explanations articulated within a relevance theory framework seem to me both plausible and promising for the analysis of poetic images.

In a relevance theory perspective, emergent properties are derived inferentially, shaped by the context of the metaphor or conceptual combination in question.[14] Wilson and Carston also note that premises for inference might be provided by sensory and kinaesthetic representations. In the case of a metaphorical butcher, we might—in the context of talking about surgeons, who cut bodies—imagine how a butcher cuts animal bodies, slicing swiftly through whole lumps of flesh and bone. A surgeon who cut bodies in such a manner would be grossly incompetent and at best indifferent to his patients’ wellbeing, and thus we infer these properties in the surgeon.[15] In the clichéd case of the surgeon-butcher, sensorimotor engagement with the image is probably fairly cursory. According to relevance theory, this metaphor is processed using so-called ‘ad hoc’ concepts: the encoded concept butcher is replaced by the ad hoc concept BUTCHER*, meaning somebody who cuts bodies in a particular way, and this ad hoc concept then forms part of the explicit content of the utterance. However, Carston has suggested that novel or extended metaphors can be processed using not ad hoc concepts but rather ‘a slower, more global appraisal of the literal meaning of the whole’, involving a more sustained sensorimotor engagement.[16] Carston comments that this sensorimotor imagining might be responsible for emergent properties, citing Zoë Heller’s description in her novel *The Believers* of depression as ‘a toad that squatted wetly on your head until it finally gathered the energy to slither off’. This image, in Carston’s analysis, gives rise to the emergent property of ‘the (not fully verbalizable) feeling of heavy hopelessness and inertia that is typical of depression but is not a component of our encyclopaedic (conceptual) knowledge about (squatting) toads’.[17]

It seems to me that Carston’s insight points to a way of thinking about what ‘emerges’ in poetry when sensorimotor responses are prompted. However, some poetry also demands that we reflect more on the sensorimotor responses that images can invite, and on the ways in which they can produce emergent properties. While we easily infer that the butcher-surgeon is incompetent, and feel confident about this inference, more creative poetic images require a more extensive gloss to **(p.135)** capture what emerges and how it does so. Although the metaphors analysed by Carston are more complex than the clichéd butcher-surgeon, she focuses on (more or less) extended metaphors, such as Macbeth’s claim that ‘Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage’, and she has in mind a metaphor with a literal level

understood as single and coherent, so that ‘a coherent set of conceptual representations is formed’ (p. 310). By contrast, my discussion of poetry aims to move the notion of emergent properties away not only from obviously inferred properties like those of the surgeon-butcher, but also from images conceived as single and coherent; that is, away from the model of a metaphor which imagines ‘one thing through another’. Instead, I will examine images which can produce multiple sensorimotor responses and hence a particularly ‘vague’ nexus of feelings and ideas, a particularly complex set of ‘emergent properties’. Some of the images in question are literal description, others metaphorical; often it is difficult to say—which, as we shall see, in Oliver’s case is often very much part of the point.

‘As I Stood like that, Rippling’

Oliver’s poem ‘Wings’ exemplifies her characteristic dual emphasis on both individual consciousness and merging or identifying with nature, and recalls Christensen’s definition of a ‘typical Oliver poem’ as beginning ‘with a narrow perceptual focus that frames an animal, a plant, or a portion of landscape’ before moving towards ‘revelation’ and a sense of identity ‘expanded’ by its connection with the world.[18]

I saw the heron
  poise
    like a branch of white petals
      in the swamp,

in the mud that lies
  like a glaze,
    in the water
      that swirls its pale panels

of reflected clouds;
  I saw the heron shaking
    its damp wings—
      and then I felt

an explosion—
  a pain—
    also a happiness
      I can hardly mention

(p.136) as I slid free—
  as I saw the world
    through those yellow eyes—
      as I stood like that, rippling,

under the mottled sky
  of the evening
    that was beginning to throw

its dense shadows.

No! said my heart, and drew back.
But my bones knew something wonderful
about the darkness—
and they thrashed in their cords,

they fought, they wanted
to lie down in that silky mash
of the swamp, the sooner
to fly.[19]

I focus on line 20, ‘[a]s I stood like that, rippling’. The poet has just described her own ‘explosion’, ‘pain’, and ‘happiness’ (ll. 13–15), so standing ‘like that, rippling’ suggests the shaking of a person experiencing intense joy or pain, a person who has just undergone an ‘explosion’. But another possible implication is that the poet stands like the heron. Indeed, there are clues earlier in the poem that the poet resembles the heron she observes. Her experience of ‘rippling’ was prompted by seeing a heron ‘poise’ then ‘shak[e]’ its wings (ll. 2, 10–11). The verb ‘poise’ implies a posture of balance, and also readiness or expectation;[20] with reference to herons, it indicates their statuesque stillness which can last for some time before it is broken by movement, and during which they often observe the water intently. For a reader familiar with Oliver’s work, this is likely to recall the poet who stands intently observing until the sudden advent of epiphanic experience. Thus the expansive movement of a heron’s huge wings—outwards from the centred stillness of the balanced or ‘poised’ heron—makes sense as a metaphor or comparator for the observer who ‘explodes’ in ecstasy. The poet describes herself responding to the ‘shaking’ of the wings by seeing through the heron’s eyes and ‘standing like that’: one meaning of ‘like that’, then, is ‘as the heron stands when he shakes his wings’. Yet, ‘rippling’ is, of course, most often used to describe the light undulation of water into small waves, and we have been primed to think of water by the water in which the heron stands and which is on its ‘damp wings’ (l. 11). So we may also imagine the poet’s ‘rippling’ movement as resembling that of gently undulating water. Finally, since the line is followed by a reference to a ‘mottled sky’ (l. 21), with ‘mottled’ placed **(p.137)** just three words after ‘rippling’, the two words may become associated so that the ‘rippling’ seems to be of light and darkness as well as of water.

So readers (or listeners[21]) might imagine movements made by the human body in explosive ecstasy; by enormous expansive heron wings interrupting the bird’s poise; by undulating waves of water; and perhaps by ripples of light in the sky. The combination of these sensorimotor imaginings gives some indication of what Oliver’s experience might be like, of what it might feel like to ‘slid[e] free’ (l. 17), to merge with nature. Taken together, the imagined movements suggest to me expansive suddenness combined with a softer repeated movement, and violence combined with gentleness.[22] This cluster of ideas is not, of course, a priori

associated with standing or with rippling. ‘Rippling’ certainly indicates some kind of movement but nothing like the complex or contradictory one suggested by combining the sensorimotor simulations I have outlined. So the cluster of ideas around movement, violence, and gentleness could be described as an emergent property. However, it rather extends the purview of this category.

Unlike the incompetence of the butcher-like surgeon, the cluster in question is not strongly communicated by Oliver’s images—it is part of her intention only in the extended sense of authorial intention that I articulated earlier. Moreover, it stems not from *comparing* sensorimotor simulations focused on a metaphor topic and vehicle—for example, how a butcher cuts with how a surgeon cuts—but rather from *combining* multiple sensorimotor responses to an image. Nor, by contrast with the hopeless inertia suggested by Heller’s metaphorical toad in Carston’s analysis, does it emerge from simply imagining ‘one thing through another’, exploring a single scenario from a single perspective to extract a ‘coherent set of conceptual representations’. Instead the emergence of ‘properties’ results from engaging in a range of imaginary sensorimotor experiences, undertaken from multiple perspectives or focused on different entities (some of which may or may not be metaphorical).

What does this suggest about how Oliver’s readers can get a sense of ‘merging’ with nature? Arguably the emergent property described is suggestive of what ‘merging’ feels like not only because this is the poem’s theme but also because it arises from ‘merging’ experiences focused on different entities (the observer, the heron, the landscape): the reader experiences or *knows* this sensorimotor merging in an embodied way. This assertion is very different from suggesting that metaphor indicates similarity or that it ‘blends’ X and Y, not only because the heron is not necessarily metaphorical but also because it is important that what ‘merges’ are embodied experiences rather than simply the entities X and Y. Therefore Oliver’s images suggesting multiple embodied experiences are particularly suited to her **(p.138)** distinctive ‘Romantic’ theme of merging, as well as particularly apt for demonstrating how emergent properties can arise.

‘The Soft Animal of Your Body’

I take my next example from Oliver’s well-known poem ‘Wild Geese’, which is not about ecstatic ‘merging’ with the world but does concern, among other things, our relationship to nature. I focus on the expression ‘the soft animal of your body’ (l. 4), which is likely to provoke not only thoughts about what it means for human beings to be animals but, especially for readers who heed Oliver’s calls to slowness and thinking with the body, also sensorimotor responses:

> You do not have to be good.
> You do not have to walk on your knees
> for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
> You only have to let the soft animal of your body

love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.[23]

Readers might imagine touching soft skin; indeed, the enactive account of perception suggests that imagining something soft activates the sense of touch.[24] This may involve animal skin as much as human skin. The separation of ‘you’ and ‘the soft animal of your body’ into grammatical subject and object (l. 4) arguably makes it easier to envisage these as separate entities. One might imagine the soft down of a goose, since the reference to ‘soft animal’ is the first line in ‘Wild Geese’ which might plausibly gloss its title, and a reference to wild geese later in the poem (ll. 12–13) appears to propose them as a model for the reader. At the same time, prototype theory suggests that we will imagine, or mentally ‘token’, a prototypical soft animal, **(p.139)** such as a fluffy puppy or kitten.[25] Other poems by Oliver may prime readers to imagine non-human animals, since they use the adjective ‘soft’ to describe birds or animals.[26] Furthermore, those creatures Oliver describes as soft are often small and vulnerable, for example the prey of ‘The Owl Who Comes’, or the duckling pulled to its death by the title character of ‘Turtle’.[27] Imagining such soft animals together with ‘the soft animal of your body’ may generate a more palpable awareness of the body’s vulnerability. So, for this reader at least, the poem produces a sense of touching softly, touching something vulnerable, and so touching gently, with special care. This apprehension of a need to be kind and gentle is strengthened by the contrast in the poem between ‘let[ting] the soft animal of your body / love what it loves’ and ‘walk[ing] on your knees / for a hundred miles through the desert’, an evocation of crawling whose strangeness means it is likely to produce a strong sensorimotor simulation of its own, a powerful kinesic impression of the discomfort of a harshly treated body.

Sensorimotor responses to ‘the soft animal of your body’ may also include softening one’s body by relaxing the muscles. The reader might also breathe more gently, as tends to happen when we soften the abdominal muscles. Arguably readers are primed to associate this line with breathing by links Oliver makes elsewhere between breathing and themes which are to the fore in ‘Wild Geese’, such as our ‘place’ in the world, our status as part of nature, or the

ethics of what we should do with our lives. For example, in ‘Stars’ Oliver implies that all we can do is to keep breathing in and out, in our ‘places’.[28] In ‘Sunrise’, she suggests that breathing deeply, over and over, is somehow an ethical act, an alternative to giving oneself up to die at the stake,[29] recalling the contrast in ‘Wild Geese’ between salvation through physical mortification and ‘let[ting] the soft animal of your body’ do as it will (ll. 1–5). She equates not breathing fully with not living fully.[30] ‘Sleeping in the Forest’ seems to associate the slow, deep breathing of the sleeping poet ‘rising and falling’ with the breathing of the natural world, specifically the insects and the birds.[31] *Rules for the Dance: A Handbook for Writing and Reading Metrical Verse* opens with a section on breath which states that it is ‘our own personal tie with all the rhythms of the natural world, of which we are a part’ (p. 3). Oliver’s writing **(p.140)** thus invites us to form associations—in our kinaesthetic as well as conceptual intratextual memories[32]—between breathing and a set of themes which will be at stake in ‘Wild Geese’, increasing the likelihood that we might respond to the phrase ‘the soft animal of your body’ in part through a change in breathing.[33]

So, ‘soft animal of your body’ might produce a variety of sensorimotor responses suggesting softening and relaxation, vulnerability and fragility, and kindness and gentleness. This complex combination could be regarded as an emergent property: were one to list the properties of a ‘soft animal’, one might include ‘needs looking after’ but probably not relaxation, and one would not produce anything which ‘feels’ like the combination which emerges in the poem. As I suggested in relation to ‘Wings’, the emergence of such properties through multiple sensorimotor experiences is particularly suited to Oliver’s themes: while ‘Wild Geese’ refers to our continuity with nature (our place in the ‘family of things’), the expression ‘the soft animal of your body’ can give readers a complex sense of what this continuity might feel like because it invites sensorimotor imaginings focused on different parts of the human and natural worlds.

Once again, an emergent property stems from combining sensorimotor simulations rather than either comparing those focused on a metaphor topic and vehicle or imagining ‘one thing through another’, metaphor topic through metaphor vehicle. Indeed there is not even a clear separation between tenor and vehicle, subject and object: sensorimotor responses to the ‘soft animal of your body’ might involve both the reader’s own body and those of other animals. The emergence of ‘properties’ results from engaging in a range of imaginary sensorimotor experiences, focused on different positions, such as the owner of a soft body and the toucher of a different soft body. Whereas Carston’s analysis of poetic metaphors indicates that we keep examining a single ‘coherent’ image until we find enough to satisfy us about the metaphor topic, I am suggesting that we might instead engage in multiple ways with more than one ‘picture’ and from more than one perspective.

Painting and Poetry: Natalia Wróbel’s *Like a Needle in the Haystack of Light* and Oliver’s ‘Like a Needle / in the Haystack / of Light’

I close this chapter with a quotation from Oliver alongside a painting by Natalia Wróbel which takes that quotation as its title and more generally dialogues with **(p.141)** Oliver’s poetry, cited as an inspiration for the series to which the painting belongs.[34] Invoking linguistics is more surprising in the analysis of painting than of literature; however, as noted above, relevance theory rejects a model of communication grounded in the explicit meanings which language can (in rare cases) achieve, focusing just as much on ‘vague’ communication and offering a paradigm of it (Mary’s seaside gesticulations) in which the sensory is central. Furthermore, as I have discussed, poems can engage the body in ways crucial to the cognitive responses they produce: there is therefore no simple distinction between poetry and visual art in terms of whether they invite sensorimotor responses. However, the two genres and individual artefacts under consideration engage the body differently, and these specificities can be usefully articulated within the framework of the relevance theory model of communication and cognition.

Mindful

Every day
I see or I hear
something
that more or less

kills me
with delight,
that leaves me
like a needle

in the haystack
of light.
It is what I was born for—
to look, to listen,

to lose myself
inside this soft world—
to instruct myself
over and over

in joy,
and acclamation.
Nor am I talking
about the exceptional,

the fearful, the dreadful,
the very extravagant—
but of the ordinary,

the common, the very drab,

the daily presentations.
Oh, good scholar,
I say to myself,
how can you help

(p.142) but grow wise
with such teachings
as these—
the untrimmable light

of the world,
the ocean’s shine,
the prayers that are made
out of grass?[35]

(p.143) Oliver’s ‘like a needle / in the haystack / of light’ (ll. 8–10), a simile, might at first glance seem to be a single ‘coherent’ image—a depiction of ‘one thing through another’—that would be susceptible to analysis along the lines suggested by Carston (to the extent that the lexicalized meaning of the similar expression ‘needle in *a* haystack’ did not limit sensorimotor exploration of Oliver’s simile). However, because the simile is unravelled over a succession of short lines (a poetic form typical of Oliver), readers are more likely to consider each line before turning to the following one, and so to explore any image suggested by the words up to that point without yet taking into account what comes next. In other words, we might first imagine being ‘like a needle’ before later incorporating other imagining involving ‘the

Figure 7.1. Natalia Wróbel, ‘Like a Needle in the Haystack of Light’, 2013, oil paint on canvas, 30 × 30 inches

haystack of light’. In addition, the positioning of the nouns ‘needle’, ‘haystack’, and ‘light’ emphasizes them, encouraging us to consider each in turn. Thus a full relevance theory account of emergent properties and poetic images would need to consider poetic form, an aspect of style which ‘arises … in the pursuit of relevance’.[26] In ‘Mindful’, poetic form makes it more likely that we will engage in multiple sensorimotor imaginings which, as in the other cases studied, can combine to produce complex emergent properties.

The poem’s title, ‘Mindful’, evokes a complete attention to—and awareness of—one’s experience.[37] After the initial claim that the poet’s own sensory experience occasions a rapturous delight, the reader is told that, when the poet is overcome by this delight, she is ‘like a needle’. For me at least, this prompts a sense of centredness, tautness, and rigidity in the body. The poet’s complete focus on her experience—her mindfulness and delight—are embodied in the ‘centredness’ of a thin needle: the likely stillness of somebody completely focused on looking and listening ‘feels like’ being as taut or rigid as a long thin needle. The needle’s sharpness might contribute to this sense of focus, as the already thin object is further centred in the point at its extremity. Then, in the next line, the words ‘in the haystack’ activate the lexicalized or proverbial meaning of ‘needle in a haystack’ as something tiny relative to the area in which it is located and therefore almost impossible to find, and which one would be foolish to try to find:[38] the poet is small within the vastness of what she perceives, and it would be senseless to try to separate her from it. Taken together with the sensorimotor imagining prompted by the previous line, this gives rise to a strange sense of being not only centred and taut but also lost in a larger whole. The addition of the words ‘of light’ in the following line means we can, I think, imagine being taut, erect, and centred but also merging with a mass of light—thus shimmering and perhaps quivering. (Any sense of merging or quivering will be further reinforced by the following lines, in which the looking and listening are glossed as ‘los[ing] myself’ inside a world described as ‘soft’, an adjective **(p.144)** which can suggest a fuzziness, an indeterminacy of the edges between self and world.) One might also feel blinded by the dazzle, a sensation which fits well with the impossibility of locating the ‘needle in the haystack’, but which shifts the position one occupies in relation to it, making one feel like the person looking as well as the object lost; in this sense, too, there is a kind of separateness combined with merging.

In ‘Mindful’, then, the dialectic of individuation and merging which has been detected in Oliver’s shifts between observation and ecstasy is present in the very moment of revelation or ‘delight’. The expression ‘like a needle / in the haystack / of light’ invites multiple sensorimotor imaginings which can combine to produce emergent properties. These in turn give a sense of what concomitant merging and individuation might feel like: something akin to centredness or rigidity or tautness together with blurring or merging or quivering. I turn now to Wróbel’s *Like a Needle in the Haystack of Light* which, I will suggest, shares

Oliver’s interest in concomitant merging and individuation but explores it in ways which make different calls on our bodies.[39]

Like a Needle combines broad expansive brushstrokes with focused thin and strong lines where Wróbel has pressed down hard on the canvas. Wróbel sometimes separates colours from each other in distinct blocks, but elsewhere layers one colour over another so that they partly merge, as in the yellow on top of orange towards the centre of the upper-left quarter. So arguably there is a sense of something like centring and separateness but also merging and continuity. This is likely to come to the fore particularly for those viewers who take up Wróbel’s invitation to consider her painting in relation to Oliver’s poetry and who might therefore find in it something like the dialectic of centring and merging which is so important in Oliver’s work in general as well as in the line cited in particular. Similarly, the lens of Oliver’s portrayal of ‘merging’ strengthens a sense in Wróbel’s painting of something like gentleness and conflict, or gentleness and movement: the painting combines intense movement, bright colour, and thick texture with areas of more restful light or muted colour as found particularly in the upper-right quarter of the painting.

Even without the relationship to Oliver’s work, Wróbel’s title arguably accentuates any sense of merging and centring which viewers get from the painting itself. While Wróbel, in sharp contrast to Oliver, is a painter of the abstract rather than the concrete, the title of her painting draws attention to her thin, hard strokes because they are not unlike needles; it is these lines which most express a centring or most point to a ‘rigid’, hard action by the artist. At the same time, because the brushstrokes emanate in an apparently disordered way in multiple directions, and because of the many yellows and reds, we may perceive in these colours something like hay in a haystack, although they are more vivid than in an actual **(p.145)** haystack. The blues and greens and whites incorporate into the painting the colours of sky and grass found around a haystack, bringing them together with the reds and yellows, as if a dazzling haystack were merging with its surroundings. Viewers might be reminded of the haystacks painted by Van Gogh and Monet, which also often use strong thick ‘wavy’ or ‘quivering’ strokes, and also merge the borders between haystack and sky, yet still leave the borders in place, the sky and grass beyond the haystack: the ‘shimmering’ of Impressionist painting is accentuated to the point of abstraction, the point where object and surrounding landscape merge.

This dazzling and merging of separate entities, combined with a strong centring, arguably recalls what I have described in Oliver’s poetry. However, Wróbel is not implicated in it in the way that Oliver is: the ‘merging’ and ‘centring’ seem to be primarily ‘out there in the world’, realized in the colours of haystack and sky. Of course, painting and lyric poetry in general differ in that the ‘I’ is more obviously present in the latter. And, whereas in Oliver’s poem it is ‘me’ who is ‘like a needle’, Wróbel’s extract from Oliver unsurprisingly—given the likely length of

titles of paintings—does not include this first-person pronoun, instead leaving it to the viewer to decide what it is that resembles ‘a needle in the haystack of light’ (the painting? the painter?). The viewer might infer an ‘I’, particularly if they have read Oliver’s poetry or perhaps Wróbel’s comments on meditation and focus, but equally they might not, especially since the lexicalized sense of a ‘needle in a haystack’ normally refers to an object of our gaze rather than to the human subject herself, and since—as discussed above—Wróbel’s painting might be thought to bear some limited resemblance to a depiction of a haystack, albeit in a highly abstracted form.

However, while ‘merging’ and ‘centring’ do not implicate Wróbel as they do Oliver, both Wróbel’s thick expansive brushstrokes and her thin ‘needle-like’ ones draw attention to what the artist has done with her body. As David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese have argued, works of art do not need to depict bodies—or even to be figurative—to elicit phenomenological responses: one way in which they do so is through the traces they bear of a painter’s actions.[40] What Wróbel ‘shows’ us, in part at least, is what she has done with her body. While for Oliver ‘like a needle in the haystack of light’ is a simile for the focused or ‘mindful’ poet, Wróbel—who conceives painting as a ‘moving meditation’[41]—makes the focus more physical or kinesic and invites us to feel something of how it was ‘felt’ in her body.[42] For me at least, the embodied response to Wróbel’s combination of focused and emanating brushstrokes involves a sense of something like centred strength and expansive dynamism, energy in the body together with intensity in its relationship to the canvas **(p.146)** or to the ‘haystack’, ‘needle’, and ‘light’.[43] In any event, viewers get some sense of what Wróbel’s body did and what it may have felt like—a sense more or less precise depending on how attuned our kinaesthetic knowledge of painting is, but a sense available to us all in some degree, insofar as we have all done things with our hands and bodies, made movements which are focused or expansive, hard or soft. Thus bodies—and their relationship to the ‘needle in the haystack of light’—become important in a way different from their role in the kind of sensorimotor imagining which Oliver’s images invite.

We can describe this in relevance theory terms as constituting a different kind of showing, or as inviting sensorimotor responses focused more on actions of showing than on objects shown. In this sense, relevance theory provides a framework for articulating the specificity of response that different artworks invite, and situating them within a plausible model of human communication and cognition. Conversely, the painting—and its comparison to the poem—offer relevance theory an extended sense of what the showing end of the showing–meaning communicative spectrum can entail and how the body can be involved. Wróbel’s painting, through the type of sensorimotor response it elicits, draws attention to the range of ways in which showing might involve the body. Showing can constitute drawing attention not only to what is outside oneself (a ‘haystack’, light, colour) but also to how it feels to show it. To an extent, Oliver

does this too (by encouraging us to look as she looks and listen as she listens), and similarly Peter is invited to look and sniff as Mary does; however, this aspect of communication is more to the fore in the painting.

In conclusion, I hope to have shown that relevance theory offers a fruitful framework for focusing on sensorimotor imagining. Currently scholars are making many and varied intellectual efforts to go beyond post-structuralism and beyond the ‘linguistic turn’, in particular to analyse the senses and the emotions. Relevance theory’s contribution to this work might be its account—grounded in a plausible model of human cognition and communication—of how impressions and emotions can be produced at the micro-level of the sentence or gesture or action. In this chapter, by focusing on sensorimotor responses, I hope to have enhanced relevance theory accounts of showing and particularly of emergent properties. At the same time, I have suggested that they offer a way to articulate some of what goes on when we respond to poetic or visual artefacts, in particular when Oliver’s readers ‘deepen their journey into the leaves and the sky’ and, more generally, when readers encounter poetic images and feel emerging a constellation of emotions or impressions which ‘go beyond the words’ of the poem.

Notes:

([1]) *See Adrian Pilkington*, Poetic Effects: A Relevance Theory Perspective *(Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2000).* For an extended philosophical account of ‘experience’ as an aesthetic phenomenon, see *Jean-Marie Schaeffer*, L’Expérience esthétique *(Paris: Gallimard, 2015). This issue is arguably intrinsic to the discussion elsewhere in this volume of sensorimotor effects, kinesis, etc.*

([1]) I am indebted to the late Andrea Noble for her insightful responses to a draft of this chapter. The chapter began as a paper presented at the Oslo Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature, at a conference on ‘Metaphor, Imagery, and Communication’, and I am grateful for the invitation to speak about a literary example in English, which gave me the opportunity to think more about Oliver. I would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for a Philip Leverhulme Prize which is funding my current research into literature and the cognitive sciences; this chapter forms part of that research.

([2]) On Oliver’s ‘latter-day Romanticism’, see Mark Johnson, ‘“Keep looking”: Mary Oliver’s Emersonian Project’, *The Massachusetts Review*, 46.1 (2005), 78–98 (pp. 78, 88). Oliver has also been described as ‘Romantic’ or ‘post-Romantic’. On Oliver as ‘ecopoet’ or her poetry as ‘ecological’, see John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (Athens, GA; London: University of Georgia Press, 2nd ed., 1996), pp. 216–28; J. Scott Bryson, *The West Side of any Mountain: Place, Space, and Ecopoetry* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2005), pp. 75–97; Kirstin Hotelling Zona, ‘“An attitude of noticing”: Mary Oliver’s ecological ethic’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 18.1

(2011), 123–42; Laird Christensen, ‘The pragmatic mysticism of Mary Oliver’, in J. Scott Bryson (ed.) *Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction* (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2002), pp. 135–52.

([3]) Zona, ‘An attitude of noticing’; Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack, *Postmodern Humanism in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 37–49; Johnson, ‘Oliver’s Emersonian project’; Bryson, *The West Side*.

([4]) *Relevance*, pp. 54–60.

([5]) *Rules for the Dance: A Handbook for Writing and Reading Metrical Verse* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), p. 73.

([6]) *Relevance*, pp. 55–60.

([7]) Beyond this continuum—beyond the ‘middle ground’ that Lyne describes—are readings an author could not recognize (or have recognized) as fulfilling their intention, readings against the grain, intended, for example, to expose ideologies, but which are distinct from those which fit somewhere along the continuum of fulfilling an author’s intention.

([8]) Adrian Pilkington, Barbara MacMahon, and Billy Clark have argued that an approach to literature based on relevance theory should consist in explaining ‘existing readings in cognitive pragmatic terms’; ‘Looking for an argument: a response to Green’, *Language and Literature*, 6.2 (1997), 139–48 (p. 141). However, even where there is a dominant ‘existing reading’ to work with, it is difficult to distinguish absolutely between explaining readings and performing them, insofar as accounts of what readers and authors do cannot be divorced from ‘reading’ the texts they use to do it.

([9]) Our cognitive system is automatically geared to picking out objects and inferences that seem likely to meet the requirements of an optimal ‘cost-benefit analysis’, producing the greatest cognitive effects (the benefits) for the available processing effort; see *Relevance*, pp. 123–32, and the Introduction to this volume, pp. 12–13.

([10]) www.onbeing.org/program/mary-oliver-listening-to-the-world/transcript/8051#main_content.

([11]) ‘Foreword’, in *Poetry Comes Up Where It Can: An Anthology*, edited by Brian Swann (Salt Lake City, UT: The University of Utah Press, 2000), p. xiv.

([12]) ‘The pragmatic mysticism’, pp. 139–42.

([13]) James Hampton, ‘Emergent attributes in combined concepts’, in T. Ward, S. Smith, and J. Vaid (eds) *Creative Thought: An Investigation of Conceptual Structures and Processes* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1997), pp. 83–110.

([14]) Deirdre Wilson and Robyn Carston, ‘Metaphor, relevance and the “emergent property” issue’, *Mind & Language*, 21.3 (2006), 404–33; Deirdre Wilson and Robyn Carston, ‘Metaphor and the “emergent property” problem: a relevance-theoretic treatment’, *The Baltic International Yearbook of Cognition, Logic and Communication*, 3 (2008): *A Figure of Speech*, 1–40; Rosa E. Vega Moreno, *Creativity and Convention: The Pragmatics of Everyday Figurative Speech* (Amsterdam; Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 2007), pp. 101–12; Vega Moreno, ‘Metaphor interpretation and emergence’, *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*, 16 (2004), 297–322.

([15]) ‘Metaphor, relevance’ (2006), 423 and n. 11.

([16]) ‘Metaphor: ad hoc concepts, literal meaning and mental images’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 110.3 (2010), 295–321 (p. 297). See also Robyn Carston and Catherine Wearing, ‘Metaphor, hyperbole and simile: a pragmatic approach’, *Language and Cognition*, 3.2 (2011), 283–312. On ad hoc concepts, see the Introduction and Chapter 8 in this volume.

([17]) ‘Metaphor: ad hoc concepts’, 307, 314.

([18]) ‘The pragmatic mysticism’, pp. 140, 144.

([19]) ‘Wings’ from House of Light by Mary Oliver (Beacon Press Boston, Copyright © 1990 by Mary Oliver; reprinted by permission of The Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency Inc.).

([20]) www.oed.com/view/Entry/146666?rskey=G3sldR&result=3#eid [accessed 27 August 2016].

([21]) Sensory effects of poetry might, of course, include not only those produced by its images—the subject of this chapter—but also hearing (or imagining hearing) the poet’s voice. On metre and sensory images, see G. Gabrielle Starr, ‘Multisensory imagery’, in Lisa Zunshine (ed.) *Introduction to Cognitive Cultural Studies* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), pp. 275–91.

([22]) The final lines of the poem reinforce this conjoined violence and gentleness, through references to ‘darkness’ and ‘thrashing’ of the ‘bones’ together with lying down ‘in that silky mash’.

([23]) In *New and Selected Poems*, vol. 1 (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 110; first published in *Dream Work* (1986).

([24]) Perception is termed ‘enactive’ because it is considered to be something we do with our bodies: we perceive the world by active enquiry and exploration. In other words, we *enact* our perceptual experience. See Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

([25]) On prototypes, see Eleanor Rosch, ‘Cognitive representation of semantic categories’, *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 104.3 (1975), 192–233; George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago, IL; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987). A blogpost provides evidence of these particular animals coming to the mind of at least one other reader. ‘I only have to let the soft animal of my body love what it loves. That’s all? That’s harder than the first two, harder than anything. It sounds so appealing, so cozy, like a kitten cuddling in your lap or a dog snoozing gently in the sun. Soft, warm, relaxed, loving what you love, not thinking about anything else’, https://maryoliverchallenge.wordpress.com/2015/06/28/what-is-the-mary-oliver-challenge-2.

([26]) For an example which also echoes ‘Wild Geese’ in other ways, see the sparrow in ‘Just Lying on the Grass at Blackwater’, *New and Selected*, vol. 2 (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005), pp. 64–5; originally published in *Blue Iris* (2004).

([27]) ‘The Owl Who Comes’, *New and Selected*, vol. 2, pp. 52–3; ‘Turtle’, *House of Light*, pp. 22–3.

([28]) *New and Selected*, vol. 2, p. 127; originally published in *West Wind* (1997).

([29]) *New and Selected*, vol. 1, pp. 125–6; originally published in *Dream Work* (1986).

([30]) ‘Have You Ever Tried to Enter the Long Black Branches’, in *New and Selected*, vol. 2, pp. 141–4 (142); originally published in *West Wind* (1997).

([31]) *New and Selected*, vol. 1, p. 181; originally published in *Twelve Moons* (1979).

([32]) Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures: Embodiment and Cognition in Literary Narrative* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 50–65, 123–66; originally published as *Le Style des gestes: corporéité et kinésie dans le récit littéraire* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Editions BHMS, 2008); see also the Introduction and Chapter 3 in this volume.

([33]) It seems that at least some readers respond this way, since the line is cited on a number of websites with reference to various relaxation and breathing practices. For example, http://beingjackbutler.com/relaxing-into-our-animal-nature, www.heartofvillageyoga.com/restorative-yoga-benefit, www.bristolmassagetherapy.co.uk/meet-the-team/sarah-thorne, http://

mindfulrelaxation.com/fee-schedule. I first encountered the poem read aloud at a Buddhist retreat focused on embodied practices including breathing meditation, and softening of the breath was among my own responses to it.

([34]) http://nataliaswrobel.com/section/384250-Embrace-Series-click-to-view-series.html.

([35]) ‘Mindful’ from *Why I Wake early: New Poems*, by Mary Oliver (Beacon Press Boston, Copyright © 2004 by Mary Oliver; reprinted by permission of The Charlotte Sheedy Literary Agency Inc.).

([36]) *Relevance*, p. 219.

([37]) ‘fully aware of the moment, whilst self-conscious and attentive to this awareness’, www.oed.com/view/Entry/118740?redirectedFrom=mindful#eid [accessed 4 August 2016].

([38]) ‘*needle in a haystack* and variants: something that would be immensely difficult to find. Usually taken as an example of something it is foolish to attempt to find. Chiefly in proverbial phrases, as *to look for a needle in a haystack*’, www.oed.com/view/Entry/125771#eid35043081 [accessed 31 July 2016].

([39]) As with Oliver’s poems, my response to Wróbel’s painting is intended to correspond to what relevance theory would term Wróbel’s ‘informative intention’ but is not the only one which would do so. For instance, my knowledge of Oliver is more attuned than any kinaesthetic memory of painting so, while Wróbel renders both of these accessible contexts, as relevance theorists might put it, I can create more ‘cognitive effects’ with the first than the second.

([40]) ‘Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience’, *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11.5 (2007), 197–203.

([41]) For example, http://nataliaswrobel.com/news.html.

([42]) For the viewer whose knowledge of Oliver means that the painting raises a question about the place of the human subject in relation to the ‘haystack of light’, this embodied response may become the object of conscious reflection and take on a particular significance; however, research into phenomenological responses suggests that, whether or not this is the case, it operates on a pre-conscious level.

([43]) Wróbel has more than once selected as titles for her paintings lines from Oliver’s poetry which invoke (as well as light or fire) precisely an intensity of relationship to the world, for example *Be Ignited, or Be Gone* (a line from ‘What I Have Learned So Far’) and *Another One of the Ways to Enter Fire* (from ‘Sunrise’).